

A Report on
Re Designing

High Schools

Symposium

June 5, 2003

**James A. Baker III
Institute for Public Policy
Rice University**

Houston A+ Challenge (*formerly Houston Annenberg Challenge*)
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Carnegie Corporation of New York
Change Leadership Group at Harvard Graduate School of Education
Greater Houston Partnership
Houston Independent School District

Preface

Houston is widely known for the spirit of collaboration that permeates its civic activities. Businesses, philanthropic foundations, civic groups, the arts, the medical community, the education community, elected officials and other policymakers frequently marshal their resources in support of initiatives to improve our quality of life and bolster our standard of living.

Education is a prime example. We know that isolated school systems are less effective in educating children to full capacity. School systems can no longer afford to operate alone any more than a successful business can in today's highly mobile, global society. Students need skill sets that are transferable, which can only be provided to them and their teachers by diverse and committed partners in the community.

Therefore, since 1997, the community has been working through The Houston A+ Challenge (formerly The Houston Annenberg Challenge) with school districts in and around Houston to create and then put in place new models of public schooling to create future citizens and leaders who are lifelong learners. These partnerships provide focus, create synergy, expand possibilities and resources, force issues, create solutions, and provide accountability for these new models.

The challenge is to build a culture that allows everyone to work together—one that creates a sense of urgency through awareness and understanding, and includes structures for capacity for change to take place. Change efforts must be developed around a plan that belongs to all the stakeholders and one that is based on true outcomes.

The "Redesigning High Schools" Symposium that is the subject of this report is one step toward building a community-wide awareness of the need and urgency for change around our high schools. As you read the report, take a moment to reflect on how you can fit into the partnership and what you can do to move the initiative forward.




Linda Clarke
Executive Director
Houston A+ Challenge






TABLE OF CONTENTS



Introduction	1
Student Testimonials	3
Challenges Facing High Schools	5
Texas Academic Readiness	8
Systemic Change at the High School Level	11
What's Underway in Houston High Schools	14
Community/Business Implications	17
Policy Implications	20
Symposium Outcomes	24





Introduction

On June 5, 2003, seven organizations representing elementary and secondary education, business, universities and foundations hosted a groundbreaking symposium drawing opinion leaders from across the state and the country to explore the issue of improving secondary schools in Texas.

"Redesigning High Schools" was hosted by the Houston A+ Challenge (formerly The Houston Annenberg Challenge) along with the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Change Leadership Group at Harvard Graduate School of Education, The Greater Houston Partnership, and the Houston Independent School District. The symposium was attended by more than 140 key policy makers from across the state who came to explore restructuring large, comprehensive high schools into small, personalized schools with rigorous academics.

We examined high schools from the inside out. From a student testimonial panel, we heard first hand how students view their high schools and what they believe should be changed. We heard from John Stevens, executive director, Texas Business and Education Coalition, about the state's efforts to enhance students' academic readiness and set the global context for the challenges facing high schools.

Tony Wagner, co-director, Change Leadership Group, Harvard Graduate School of Education and Constancia Warren, senior program officer & director of urban high school initiatives, Carnegie Corporation of New York spoke about the national effort – of which Houston is a part – to change the culture of high schools from one of anonymity to one of personalization.

Houston ISD principals and administrators told the audience how Houston high schools have begun to implement change on their campuses to create small learning communities with rigorous personalized instruction. Representatives of the corporate world and the community detailed the profile of the worker needed today.

The day concluded with a panel consisting of Stefanie Sanford, senior policy officer for education & libraries, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Hans Meeder, deputy assistant secretary for policy, U.S. Department of Education; and Paul Cruz, deputy commissioner, dropout prevention and initiatives, Texas Education Agency. Their panel discussed the policy implications of transforming high schools and ways to implement the ideas and strategies learned from the symposium.

This report gives readers the background behind the symposium, summarizes each speaker or panel's presentation and then relates outcomes. We hope this report will be useful to educators, parents, business people and policy makers working to move Texas forward on the path toward small high schools in which every student learns the knowledge and skills needed for success in today's information age.

Background

The student population of Texas is growing rapidly. During the last 10 years it has grown by more than 15%. The largest category of new high school students is immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Texas Education Agency (TEA) statistics state that more than 26% of new high school students are immigrants. (TEA, 2002) This trend has resulted in a public school population that is predominately minority (60%) and poor (52% are defined as economically disadvantaged). These changing demographics hold true throughout Texas and are especially pronounced in urban districts and selected rural areas.

Meanwhile, these demographic trends are occurring in a new economic climate. Research shows that a higher level of education is essential for individuals today more than at any other time in our nation's history if our country is to continue positive economic and civic growth. Yet demographic studies have found the populations described above are coming to Texas with an educational level well below other immigrant groups, below students who transfer from other states, or below the resident population of Texas. (Stephen Klineberg, Houston's Economic and Demographic Transformation, 2003).

This lack of preparation shows up in data from the high school and college level as well. The latest data for Texas from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (class of 2001) shows that only 58% of the students graduated who entered the 9th grade four years earlier. Of those who graduated, only 54% entered a college, community college, or accredited technical school in Texas.

Of those who entered higher education, only 51% were deemed "college ready" using the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board standard. Put another way, a mere 28% of all 2001 graduates and 17% of those who entered in 9th grade were "college ready."

Of the graduates, 3,068 entered a Texas public institution of higher education, with another 325 entering private or non-Texas schools. This represents 44% of all graduates or 18% of original ninth graders. Of those who entered higher education, 1,074 were considered "college-ready" (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board). This represents 32% of all those who entered higher education and 6% of the original ninth grade.

It is clear there is great need for change in our state.





Student Testimonials

In the first panel of the symposium, four students representing three Houston high schools that are engaged in the redesign process commented on their educational experiences and recommended ways of improving them. Moderator Charla Stuart led a discussion focused on two major issues: what aspects of today's public schools need improvement and what are students' experiences of the redesign process to date. The three schools represented on the panel are at different stages of restructuring their organizations and redesigning teaching practice. One of the schools started the planning stage this year. It is preparing to implement a new model in the 2004-05 school year. A second school has divided its students into operational small learning communities comprised of a stable student and teacher body, which, starting in the 2003-04 school year, will remain together for four years. The third school implemented four-year small learning communities three years ago.

On the issue of what aspects of today's public schools need improvement, students said resources are often in short supply. One senior pointed out that the 36 people in her computer class have only 25 computers and use outdated software. Another senior said the 36 students in his biotechnology class share three textbooks. Students said this shortage of textbooks makes it difficult for them to focus and follow the material presented in class. In another example, most of the textbooks used in the school stay in the classroom where the class is taught, a student said, making it difficult for students to study at home.

Students also said they wanted smaller class sizes and engaging teachers who know them. One student said some of her classes are taught as monotonous lectures; she wished for a more engaging method of instruction. She also wished that her teachers, particularly those whom she has had for the last two years, knew her name. Two of the students wished schools offered more support for students going to college. The students suggested that schools offer courses or assign school time for Scholastic Aptitude Test preparation as much as a year and a half before taking the test, provide more encouragement for taking the tests, and supply more information about college scholarships. SAT preparation could be carried out either as a separate class or during a study hall period between classes and after-school activities, the students suggested.

On the issue of students' reaction to the school redesign process to date, the pupils said that although much work remains to be done at their schools, they could feel that changes for the better are taking place and could sense the changes as they happened. Students singled out the redesign process for already improving communication and strengthening relationships with faculty.

Asked to suggest ways in which students can participate in improving their schools, one student pointed to a change at her school. In August, an advisory committee comprised of students from all grade levels began meeting on a regular basis under the supervision of a teacher to discuss troubling school practices and provide constructive criticism. Keeping a professional attitude and limiting the discussion to the committee's members, students will seek to find solutions to problems they encounter in the classrooms.

A senior at a school that was among the first to implement changes in structure and teaching methods said that teacher-student communication improved dramatically with implementation of small learning communities. The more than 2,000 students who attend the school were divided into 10 small learning communities, each with a core of teachers who teach the same students for four consecutive years. The school also implemented an adult advocate program, which ensures that each student has an adult on campus who guides him from 9th grade through graduation. The adult advocate meets with the students on a regular basis (at least once weekly), helps them solve problems, advises them what courses to take, and informs them of opportunities on and off campus. Initially, the student said, he was resistant to the idea and had difficulty getting along with his advocate, but after resolving the communication troubles, the student said he has come to appreciate the presence of a trustworthy adult with whom he can share his problems. The student went on to say these two changes led him to decline to transfer to another school when the opportunity arose. Instead, he chose to stay because, he says, "I felt that my school had what it took for me to get myself together, to become a better person, and to become successful."

Ms. Stuart is a program coordinator at the Houston A+ Challenge.



Challenges Facing High Schools

Tony Wagner, Ph.D./Harvard University

In the second presentation of the symposium, Dr. Wagner reevaluated the problems of high school education and suggested solutions. In his view, the high school predicament is caused by obsolete curriculum and educational practices. "The world has changed in very fundamental ways; families and students have changed in very fundamental ways. But schools, teaching, and curriculum have not," said Dr. Wagner. Most significant are the changes in these four areas: the types of skills required of employees; researchers' understanding of the learning process; the character of active citizenship; and families' and students' lifestyles.

Even though only 50% to 60% of all jobs require a college education, high school graduates often find themselves unqualified for jobs that should be available to them. According to Dr. Wagner, the changing character of the economy requires students to have skills that they do not acquire in high school. Businesses seek employees who are self-motivated learners, who are able to think critically and solve problems, and who communicate effectively and work well in teams. The present educational system does not know how to teach or assess these skills. Even though employees see written competence as evidence of one's reasoning and communicative capabilities, high school students receive minimal training in writing. Teachers find it physically impossible to read the papers of the large numbers of students they teach and, instead, focus on material whose mastery can be examined through tests. As a result, graduating seniors may find themselves ill equipped even for an entry-level position at Starbucks because the application requires a written answer to three essay questions.

The need for change in the educational system is necessitated not only by the requirements of the marketplace but also by the growing understanding of how successful learning takes place. Dr. Wagner outlined three essential advances that have been made in this area. First, researchers have come to appreciate the role of active learning. Hands-on experience has proven much more effective than reading or observing, yet is little used in educational practice. Second, students have diverse learning styles. Traditionally educators do not take this into account, even though many students already recognize it.

Third, the educational system in its present form was developed at a time of a comparative scarcity of information. In the last 100 years, an unprecedented growth of research has led to a doubling of the amount of available information every five to seven years. New discoveries constantly render previous information obsolete. A high school curriculum based on subject content knowledge faces the insurmountable challenge of catching up with an avalanche of new findings. Dr. Wagner rec-

ommended that instead of memorizing facts, students be required to master skills that allow them to function in the new informational environment. Students should be taught how to find, use, and apply knowledge. They should learn how to analyze and synthesize information, how to reason and present ideas.

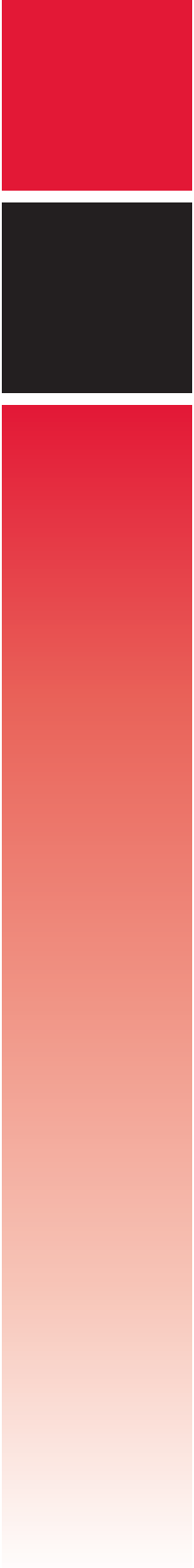
The ability to obtain information and evaluate it critically is just as important for success in college and at work as it is for one's ability to participate in civic life. Dr. Wagner pointed out that the rapid decline in civic participation during the last 40 years is an alarming indicator of people's lack of involvement. Since the 1960s, voting and contribution to community efforts has declined by 50%. As a part of the remedy, many agree that schools should teach youngsters not only information but also "emotional intelligence" and values like respect and responsibility. According to Dr. Wagner, such demands are based on people's understanding, first, that in the contemporary economy people skills are becoming more and more important and, second, that "democracy is not a value-free form of governance." "If we don't learn to respect one another, we can't have civil discourse. And without civil discourse, democracy begins to break down," said Dr. Wagner.

Unfortunately, according to research by the Public Agenda Foundation cited by Dr. Wagner, public schools offer few examples of respectful relationships. Only 41% of all students in the survey said most of their teachers respected them. Asked what would they change if they could alter only one thing about their school, 68% of the students answered, "Having teachers who know me, who care about me." The need to develop a sense of respect and tolerance is made ever more urgent by the increasingly multicultural nature of American society. More personal interaction between teachers and students would help alleviate the problem. However, Dr. Wagner pointed out, student-teacher relationships can be improved only in an environment that involves respectful interaction between members of the faculty, and between the faculty and district administrators.

In addition to the three reasons for change in high school education listed so far, employers' new skill requirements, growing understanding of the learning process, and the need to prepare students for active citizenship, Dr. Wagner suggested a fourth reason related to students' altered life circumstances. Previously, students learned because of fear and respect for authority. Today, neither of these has a strong motivational power. Unequivocal respect for authority has evaporated. Its absence can be traced back to the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, Watergate and the Vietnam era. Like respect for authority, the belief in the equation of hard work, success, and happiness has also disappeared. Today's youth is driven by a search for instant gratification, mall culture, and consumer values. It is important for educators to recognize that the old ideals no longer play the motivating role that they used to and that new ways are needed to motivate students. Dr. Wagner warned that the current educational system has not recognized these subtle changes and is still "predicated on a set of assumptions about what motivates kids that is completely out of touch" with reality.

Educators' understanding of students' life at home is also out-of-date. More and more parents work two jobs or raise their kids without a partner and have less time to spend with their children. The average student spends only 5% of his or her time with adults, and spends alone just as much time as he or she does with friends. Teachers have an opportunity to compensate for the decreasing adult presence. However, the current system does not facilitate this and instead fosters anonymity and lack of





personal interaction between students and faculty. Most children have never had a one-on-one conversation with a teacher beyond a few casual remarks about homework or discipline, said Dr. Wagner.

Dr. Wagner recommended redefining high schools in relation to the new environment in which schools operate. It is inappropriate to repeat the old refrain, 'Schools are failing,' he said. The statement is factually incorrect since today more and more students take advanced classes and apply for college. Last year, scores on the mathematics section of the SAT were the highest in 30 years. In addition, such accusations have a demoralizing effect on educators. It deprives them of the respect and support of their community and makes it even harder to earn the respect of students. Schools are not failing, underlined Dr. Wagner. They simply work within the framework of an obsolete system. To solve the high school predicament, it will not be enough to reform the system. It will have to be reinvented. According to Dr. Wagner, three principles should guide the reinvention process: rigor, relevance, and relationships.

In the new system, rigor should refer not to the painstaking covering of class material but to systematically teaching students the core competencies needed in today's market place and college. For example, a rigorous chemistry course would require from students not familiarity with the properties of all chemical elements but rather knowledge of what constitutes scientific method, so that by the end of their education students are able to approach a problem independently, to design a study, and to generate a hypothesis and experiment to test it. The relevance of a course would ensure that through independent work and hands-on projects, students acquire the skills that they will need most after graduation. Dr. Wagner suggested making internships a mandatory part of high school education as a way to involve students in active learning. Respectful relationships between teachers and students should become educators' goal. An educational system that facilitates personal familiarity also fosters respect. According to Dr. Wagner, in the current system, it is impossible for a teacher to come to know his or her students (often more than a 100) and respond to their needs in one school year. However, a non-anonymous environment is crucial if the current school system is to change for the better.

Dr. Wagner concluded on an optimistic note. Schools that implement the three new R's (rigor, relevance, and respect) already exist across the country. Reinvention is within the reach of "educators who are supported and empowered by their communities, who are learning to work together in new ways and create new knowledge for solving this problem."

Dr. Wagner is a co-director of the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard School of Education and author of Making the Grade: Reinventing America's Schools.

Texas Academic Readiness

John Stevens/Texas Business and Education Coalition (TBEC)

In a presentation entitled "Texas Academic Readiness," Mr. Stevens talked about the implementation of the new Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) accountability test and about some of the steps that are being taken to prepare students for new high school graduation requirements.

Mr. Stevens pointed out that in 1999 the Senate approved SB 103 which, following a recommendation from the TBEC board, moved the exit-level assessment from 10th to 11th grade. The legislation was implemented first in the 2002-2003 school year. In 2003, the American Diploma Project evaluated the match between the Texas high school graduation requirements and the skills required for success in college and the workplace. The investigation concluded that both the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and the TAKS test administered in the 11th year of schooling provide adequate learning standards.

Mr. Stevens explained that the new test demands more from students than the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) administered so far; it assesses their abstract reasoning abilities as well as their skills in comparing and contrasting concepts. According to TAKS' provisions, seventh graders are to be tested on reading, writing, and math; 8th graders on reading, math and social studies, and the 9th graders on reading and math. The knowledge of 10th and 11th graders is assessed in the areas of math, science, social studies, and English language arts.

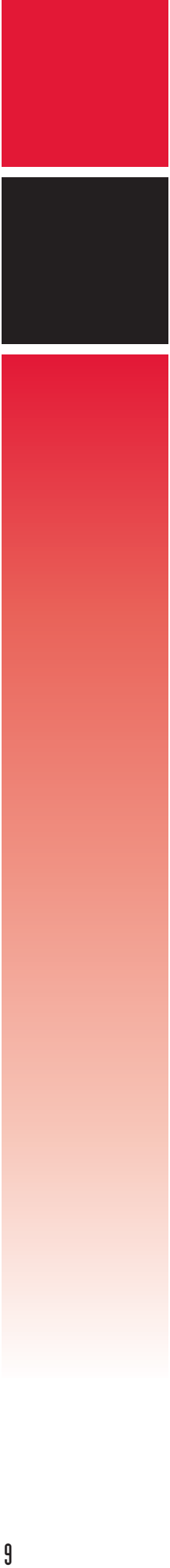
Because the new test is more difficult and assesses more subject areas than its predecessor, TAKS will replace TAAS. In the past school year, all students between 8th and 11th grade were administered the new test. The pass standard for students between 8th and 10th grade was set at two Standard Errors of Measurement (SEM) below the eventual standard of the test. (One SEM corresponds to three or four correct answers.) Some of the 11th graders took the test with the passing standard set at two SEM, others at one SEM, and still others with no adjustment at all. Their results counted only for comparative purposes. The students who were in 10th grade in 2003 will take the TAKS test in 2004 and 2005 with two SEM adjustments. For the rest of the current students, the assessment bar will be raised progressively every year. The 2003 9th graders will take three TAKS tests with adjustment of one SEM before graduating. The 2003 8th graders will have one SEM adjustment next year and no

Established in 2001, the American Diploma Project seeks to ensure that American high school graduates have the knowledge and skills they need for success after graduation. The project works in five states to define what higher education and business expect from high school graduates in reading, writing, and mathematics; to ensure that the state standards and assessments reflect those expectations; and to generate demand from higher education and business for standards-based high school assessment data in their admissions, placement, and hiring process.

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills outline the competences required of every student by the statewide accountability system. Adopted in 1997, TEKS are at the core of the Texas curriculum and define the basic content of the state's instructional program.

The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is a criterion-referenced assessment program based on the state's core of essential competencies with subtests in reading, writing, and mathematics.





adjustments for the last three years of study. By 2007, all high school students will have to pass a TAKS test without adjustments in order to continue to the next grade level or to graduate.

Meeting the TAKS' new graduation requirements constitutes a monumental challenge for both students and educators. The 11th graders who took the unadjusted TAKS test this year demonstrate the greatest need of improvement: Only one in four African-American students and one in three Hispanic students passed the math section of the test. A little more than a half of the white pupils passed the test. Mr. Stevens pointed out that by measuring a higher achievement range, TAKS gives an opportunity to the highest performing kids to earn credit for the full extent of their knowledge. As a result, the gap between the highest and the lowest scores dramatically increases. It brings out divisions along ethnic lines that were obscured by previous tests. The unadjusted results demonstrate both the disadvantaged position of minority students and the need to drastically improve students' preparation especially in math and science, concluded Mr. Stevens. All ethnic groups consistently score higher on the social studies and language arts parts of the assessment than they do on the math and science parts.

Next, Mr. Stevens delineated some of the steps that are being taken both by TBEC and the state of Texas to help educators meet the new requirements. A TBEC initiative called Meeting the High School Challenge brought together more than 50 members from universities, regional service centers, leading school districts, educational organizations, and the Texas Education Agency. The goal of the initiative is to develop recommendations for school districts and schools on how to prepare students to meet the exacting academic standards of TAKS. Members will seek to identify actions, tools, and materials that educators could use to improve instruction in the courses covered in the tests. In addition, the group will work to develop a climate of acceptance and support for systemic high school reform.

Another initiative described by Mr. Stevens is the Performance Information for Public Education (PIPE) established by TBEC in 2000. The initiative's goal is to supply educators with the financial and academic information they would need to improve their performance. Mr. Stevens described three of the initiative's projects: FEISTIER, WEST, and STAR. The Financial Excellence Indicator System for Texas-Information about Educational Resources (FEISTIER) is a computer database allowing educators to compare financial and performance data across districts and, as of recently, across schools in Texas.

The Web-Enabled Student Transcript (WEST), part of FEISTIER, is an effort to include in an interactive database the comprehensive transcript of each student in the Houston area. According to Mr. Stevens, 30% to 40% of students change schools at least once a year. The Internet accessible database will save schools the money, time, and effort associated with the traditional paper trail of transcripts in addition

to minimizing the number of mistakes. The project, a collaboration between TBEC, The Houston A+ Challenge and the Greater Houston Partnership, seeks to enroll all 54 Houston area school districts in WEST as well as to expand beyond the Houston area.

A third part of the PIPE initiative is the Standardized Test Analysis and Reporting (STAR). The project developed a computer program for the Texas school system that analyzes districts' and schools' test scores in a matter of hours, reduces administrative workload, increases effectiveness, and makes it possible to quickly spot patterns and tendencies.

Mr. Stevens pointed out that the state is also seeking ways to help educators. SB 1108 allowed the basic skills funds to be used for intensive help for at-risk students. In Mr. Stevens' view, even though these funds have been cut substantially, the recognition of at-risk students' need for extra assistance is an important achievement. The Senate also approved the expansion of the optional extended school year to high schools making it possible for students in grades K through 12 to receive additional help on nights, weekends, and during the summer. The bill also introduced a science test in 8th grade.

Mr. Stevens noted the double nature of the challenge facing Texas high schools today. The new requirements raise the expectations of teachers and students, while at the same time budget cuts decrease school funding. To address the problem, the TBEC board of directors held a special meeting. It adopted a statement intended to help policymakers in their search for a reform model in the area of public school finance. The statement suggested that proposals are considered with respect to their promise for equity, adequacy, capacity for growth, efficiency, local enrichment, and revenue generation and taxes.

Mr. Stevens concluded by saying that TBEC works to raise the bar for high school students and knows the way to do it. However, the organization needs the help of the larger community. "We need to see whether we have the political will and the public support to put in place the resources and the system that will work. We know what works, we can do it; the question is will we."

Mr. Stevens is the executive director of the Texas Business and Education Coalition (TBEC) and a founder and chairman of the Texas Principals Leadership Initiative and the Business to Teaching Initiative.





Systemic Change at the High School Level

Constancia Warren, Ph.D./Carnegie Corporation of New York

Dr. Warren discussed the importance of the school system's actions in the high school reinvention process. Carnegie Corporation of New York, in its Schools for a New Society high school and district reform initiative, emphasizes the importance of reform on the district level in the seven medium and large cities, including Houston, that are participating in the initiative. The corporation collaborates with local education reform organizations that work in partnership with the districts in these cities. With additional support from the Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation will be awarding \$60 million to these organizations during the five-year period from 2001–2006 in grants that recipients will match dollar for dollar.

According to Dr. Warren, school districts are made up of school boards, superintendents, central office staff, schools, unions and professional organizations. The district's importance is predicated on its position as the mediator that channels outside resources and pressures to shape the school environment. Districts set policy and performance expectations, allocate and deploy resources, hire and assign teachers, assign students, and hold schools accountable for their progress.

Nevertheless, many public school reform advocates have ignored the district and worked directly with the schools or groups of teachers. If the districts are not involved, "while the schools are trying to change, the standard operating systems that shape them remain the same," Dr. Warren said. This makes reforms "unsustainable, starved for support, undermined by procedures and regulations that do not fit the new practices."

Two major areas of district responsibility need improvement: use of resources and relationship with the broader community. The resources available to school districts, Dr. Warren said, are fiscal, political, informational, and organizational. School districts' budgets are frequently the largest item in the local budget, Dr. Warren said. Because the district's work may impact many jobs and generate political pressure, school districts need to have a clear vision for change to maintain their course toward reform.

The districts need to develop a system that ensures an equitable distribution of funds and stops using procedures that allocate more money to schools with advantaged students than to those with poor ones. In addition, Dr. Warren quoted Tony Alvarado, former chancellor of instruction in the San Diego Unified School District, on the double nature of the district resources: on one hand, districts do not have enough money to do what they need to do; on the other, they often have resources they are not using very well.

Districts also should assist individual high schools in allocating their resources more wisely. The Houston Independent School District has tried to address this problem by

forming high school budget planning teams of people from different divisions of the central and regional superintendent's office. The teams collaborate with each high school's leadership to review their school improvement plan and improve the institution's alignment between goals and strategies and resource allocation. Houston ISD's experience with these teams may eventually provide a successful model for the nation.

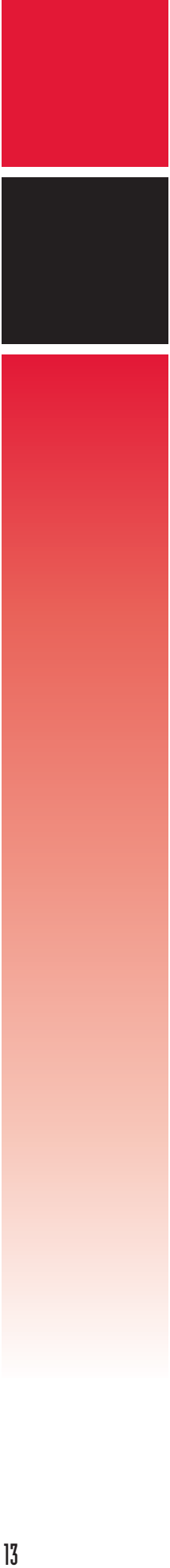
Districts also could make better use of organizational resources and minimize the gap between high and low performing institutions by assigning stronger principals to struggling schools. They also can provide assistance to schools by providing timely data that can be used by schools to inform educational decision making.

By tapping their political resources, districts should work to facilitate public acceptance of significant changes in high schools. Even though most people in the community are unhappy with the way public high schools operate, they are generally reluctant to accept significant alterations. Dr. Warren pointed out that resistance to change in the high school system is strong because schools are "cultural icons" and a source of many emotional attachments. Afraid of the unknown, most people prefer the familiar old system even if when does not work very well.

One example of how to overcome this challenge can be found in New York City. Before the start of a radical new initiative that has been gradually phasing out the lowest performing schools in the Bronx and reopening new small institutions in their place, the NYC school district gained the community's support by explaining to its members the reasons and prospects for change, and including members of the community in the teams that designed the new schools.

The relationship between the school district and the larger community is an essential asset that is rarely used to its fullest potential. According to Dr. Warren, it is necessary to "break down school districts' insularity" and develop community involvement as a counterweight against school districts' tendency to change direction with each new superintendent. Districts would benefit from collaborating with civic, advocacy, and faith-based groups as well as with grass roots and community-based organizations. Cooperative relationships with universities and businesses can be particularly fruitful. Since most new teachers and principals receive their training in local institutions of higher education, collaboration with the universities can ensure that new teachers and principals come to the workplace adequately prepared and create new venues for professional development of experienced instructors and leaders.

Dr. Warren also pointed out that it is important to build community understanding of the importance of high school reform so that the community demands excellence and change, and holds schools accountable for student achievement. By keeping the public informed about the high school reinvention process, districts can develop community involvement. Strong community support is indispensable to a district seeking local funds for a system change. In addition, community involvement is essential for securing equal access to quality education. Even though there are always affluent parents who seek to guarantee good schooling for their children, it is important to have people who think about the system as a whole and strive to provide equally effective education to all kids. Data on student performance should be collected, analyzed, and made available to both the schools and the community. Districts and schools should provide opportunities for families and youth to become actively involved in a high school's life.



In addition to improving resource allocation and building community demand and support, districts can help the high school reinvention process by providing direct institutional assistance to schools in specific ways. The central office should have a clear and coherent mission for secondary education based on confidence in the cooperative work of principals, students, and teachers. This mission should be accompanied by a coherent plan of study that takes into account the differences in students' backgrounds and levels of preparation, and should allow teachers to assist pupils who are behind and challenge those who are ahead. High school reinvention requires that districts allow schools to balance autonomy with accountability. Most high schools now have little say on who joins their staff, how their resources are allocated, and which curriculum is being used. As schools demonstrate their ability to perform, school districts should give more freedom to schools and allow them to choose whom to hire, how to use their resources, and what curriculum and assessment strategies to implement. Teachers should be allowed to make more flexible use of school time. They should be able to vary the schedule to address instructional needs and be permitted to put in place longer periods and smaller class sizes in core subjects. Teachers should be given time for planning together during the school day and for interdisciplinary exploration. Providing schools with such autonomy without eliminating strict accountability will help to build schools that are communities of learners with shared purpose and a common culture.

Another way in which the district can facilitate the work of small schools and learning communities is by adjusting old buildings for the needs of the new system. Districts also can secure the participation and support of the central administration's operational and technical units such as the budget and transportation offices. Districts can ensure a sufficient supply of qualified educational leaders. Districts could also create professional networks of principals and teachers across high schools, and develop procedures appropriate for small schools.

Dr. Warren described the model of small schools and learning communities that the Carnegie Corporation of New York believes should gradually replace traditional comprehensive high schools. Ideally, small schools will have approximately 400 students and one teacher sees 80 pupils per grading cycle. (Currently, some instructors teach as many as 180 students each, a ratio that eliminates the possibility of personal familiarity with each student's needs.) These new high schools will ensure that each student is well known by at least one instructor so that he or she can receive academic advice adapted to his or her personal strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Teacher teams will be assigned to work with groups of students, so that they can share observations about teaching and student work. By sharing experience, teachers will be able not only to improve and personalize the quality of education but also to develop a culture of internal accountability about students' progress.

Dr. Warren concluded by saying that districts need to be active participants in the high school reform process if it is to be successful at the school level. The districts should improve resource allocation, foster active community participation, and provide high schools with support and autonomy.

Dr. Warren is a senior program officer & director of urban high school initiatives at the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

What is Underway in Houston High Schools?

Panelists

Michele Pola, Ed.D./Houston A+ Challenge
Armando Alaniz/Houston Independent School District
Richard Barajas/Milby High School
Alma Webber/Worthing High School
Steve Amstutz/Lee High School

Moderator

Robert Stein, Ph.D./Rice University

In the first panel of the afternoon session, Dr. Stein moderated presentations on the district-wide Houston high school redesign process.

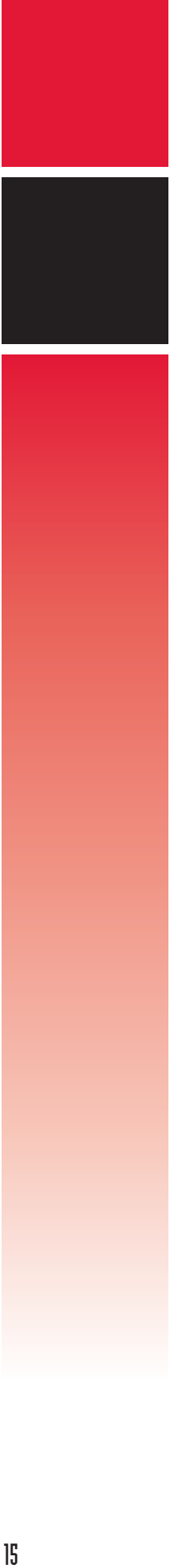
Dr. Pola outlined the mission of the partnership between the Houston Independent School District and The Houston A+ Challenge. The collaboration dates back to the mid-1990s. Initially, the two organizations united their efforts around improving student achievement in three ways: 1). By reducing teachers' isolation and developing opportunities for interaction among teachers and between teachers and members of the community; 2). By personalizing teacher-student relationships to improve learning and 3). By providing professional development opportunities for faculty, administrators, and school leaders.

In 2000, Houston A+ Challenge received funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to implement the high school redesign work called Houston Schools for a New Society (HSNS) in Houston ISD. This initiative began its work by organizing focus groups where students, educators, and employers expressed their needs and expectations of what high schools should deliver. By combining the findings from these discussions with current research, the initiative prepared a profile of the skills and knowledge needed for employment and college in the 21st century. Present day graduates need to be effective communicators, proficient problem solvers, self-directed workers and thinkers, culturally aware residents of a global world, individuals knowledgeable of worldwide issues, cooperative team members, efficient technology-users, and responsible citizens.

Houston Schools for a New Society works toward this target profile by providing direct funding to the 24 Houston ISD large, comprehensive high schools and through indirect funding for leadership training, networking and action labs. The organization works with the community, district, and schools. Through town hall meetings across the civic engagement lunches and symposia, the Houston Schools for a New Society strives to strengthen the connection between members of the community and educators to improve instruction.

Mr. Alaniz said that Houston ISD has reevaluated the nature of its relationship to high schools and is taking active steps to implement the new insights. For example, thanks to decentralization, schools receive district funding based on the number of students in attendance and allocate the money them-





selves. The Houston A + Challenge provides support and technical assistance to schools. To ensure that the reforms are systemic and not random acts of innovation, Houston ISD works hard to develop a common focus between the district and the schools. The Vision and Guiding Principles for the Houston Schools for a New Society initiative, which were approved by the district's Board of Education, include personalization, coherency, effective use of time and resources, intensive application of technology and professional development for teachers, principles, and district leaders.

To increase student achievement and the number of graduates, the district has undertaken a redesign that includes the creation of small learning communities, introduction of the adult advocate, and an integrated literacy program across the curriculum from 9th to 12th grade. The comprehensive literacy framework creates a literacy coach position on each campus to train teachers in instructional strategies for integrating reading, writing and effective communication in all content areas.

According to Mr. Alaniz, the district's accountability requirements are high. In evaluating performance, taken in consideration are not only TAKS scores but also students' graduation rates, SAT scores, and advanced placement. In the next school year, all 10th graders will take PSAT in preparation for the college required standardized test.

Mr. Barajas elaborated on the literacy component of HSNS. The definition of literacy, he said, extends beyond the basics of reading and writing. It also includes the ability to speak, listen and think effectively. In the 2001-02 school year, a discussion group among Houston high school principals on literacy problems set the groundwork for a symposium between representatives of the 24 HISD comprehensive high schools in the fall of 2002. A special taskforce outlined the shortcomings of literacy education. Members of the taskforce were particularly concerned to find out that literacy education is limited only to the language arts classrooms and is practically absent from instruction in other subjects. Their report recommended that a literacy position be introduced on each campus to attack the problem through coaching, classroom observation, data analysis, research and site training of teachers throughout the year. All 24 comprehensive high schools plan to implement the literacy coach position.

At Worthing High School, educators have begun implementing reforms. The school initiated the adult advocacy program to offer social and academic assistance to students, as well as information about college and career opportunities. According to Ms. Webber, the adult advocate's function is to provide proactive care in a child's life, to help personalize the school environment, and provide each student with the watchful eye of an informed adult. The advocates will work with the same students for four years and, if possible, for their first, post-graduate year. They will keep a portfolio of each student that contains his or her written work, test scores, certificates and any other material relevant to academic success. Ms. Webber pointed out that the program helps teachers, students, and parents to develop a new sense of

self-worth as well as effective and optimistic relationships. Students improve their academic achievement and acquire knowledge and skills to become successful and responsible citizens.

According to Mr. Amstutz, Lee High School's graduation rate was disturbingly low until recently. The school had 1,100 freshmen and only 300 seniors. These numbers as well as several incidents made it clear to Mr. Amstutz that it was time for change. He gave the example of a brilliant girl, who, even though she had precisely followed the instructions of her guidance counselor, realized weeks before graduation that she would not be able to graduate because the counselor had failed to inform her of some required courses. The anonymity of the school environment and the lack of proper adult guidance had to be eliminated, Amstutz said.

After a year of planning, the school leadership developed an action plan in partnership with the American Leadership Forum and the Institute for Research and Reform in Education. As part of the Houston Schools for a New Society Initiative, the school set out to change the practices of teaching and learning, change the relationship between adults and students, and focus all available resources on the first two points of the plan.

Lee High School divided its students into 10 small learning communities (about 220 students per community), each centered on a different theme. All of the communities are four years long, heterogeneous, have a college preparatory focus, and are autonomous. A group of 10-12 teachers, permanently assigned to each community, develops personal familiarity with the students. Family advocates, who provide personalized support and advice during the student's high school experience, combat anonymity further. In an effort to transcend the traditional forms of interaction with the community such as bake sales and newspaper drives, each small learning community has made its advisory council open for participation to parents, businesses, and universities.

Mr. Amstutz pointed out that attendance has gone up in part because the small learning communities make friendships and personal relations easier and school more appealing. Discipline has been significantly improved; students' persistence has also gone up. In the 2002-03 school year, 100 more seniors graduated than in the year before. While these positive indicators are encouraging, there is more work to be done, Mr. Amstutz said. Teaching and learning practices, in particular, require a lot of improvement. It is also necessary to strengthen the position of the family advocate and make sure that it is universally effective and its quality is not a matter of who a student's advocate is. Finally, tradition, bureaucratic procedures, and outdated local and state policies constitute additional obstacles.

*Dr. Pola is a co-director of the Houston Schools for a New Society
and associate director/director of programs at The Houston A+ Challenge.*

*Mr. Alaniz is assistant superintendent for high school improvement and accountability
at Houston ISD.*

Mr. Barajas is principal of Milby High School.

Ms. Webber is a school improvement facilitator at Worthing High School.

Mr. Amstutz is principal of Lee High School.

Dr. Stein is dean of social sciences at Rice University.



What are the Implications to the Community?

Panelists

*Rob Mosbacher/Greater Houston Partnership
Roberto Gonzalez/Employment and Training Centers*

Moderator

Sherea McKenzie/Joint City-County Commission on Children

Ms. McKenzie began by asking Mr. Mosbacher why he is involved in school reform. Mr. Mosbacher said that as a member of the business community he recognizes the high stakes employers have in a well-educated workforce; perhaps, lower only than the stakes of children, parents, and educators. After 25 years of volunteering for social causes, Mr. Mosbacher said he realizes that "there is no better opportunity to improve the success chances of individuals who are challenged by a whole host of factors than to give them a good education."

Ms. McKenzie asked whether Mr. Mosbacher has observed any changes in what Houston-based businesses require from prospective employees. Definitely, he answered, demands are changing. What the state previously considered an adequate level of preparation is insufficient today. By becoming more engaged with schools' problems and by making clear their expectations, businesses should help educators to catch up with the rising demands of the workplace. One successful example of business involvement is the Texas Scholar Program initiated by Eastman Chemical in East Texas. The company and other community members considered inadequate graduating students' competence in math and science and began an initiative for more rigorous preparation in these disciplines. The success of the project is evidenced by its growth into a nationwide initiative.

Mr. Mosbacher continued that both statistics and anecdotal evidence show that most students' high school experience is ineffective and involves little interactive learning. Considering their education to be irrelevant to the real world, many students lose motivation. The lack of application and hands-on learning can be corrected by providing students and teachers with the opportunity to visit business and production sites, to participate in the workplace, and to gain exposure to contemporary work conditions. Such interaction will help educators stay up to date with the business world; it will also give employers a chance to suggest careers to students that match their interests but that they might not consider otherwise. For example, the Texas Medical Center has a chronic shortage of nurses. The number of retiring nurses in Texas largely exceeds the number of new graduates even though the population's longevity increases the demand for their services. By making students aware of the large number of available openings in nursing, medical

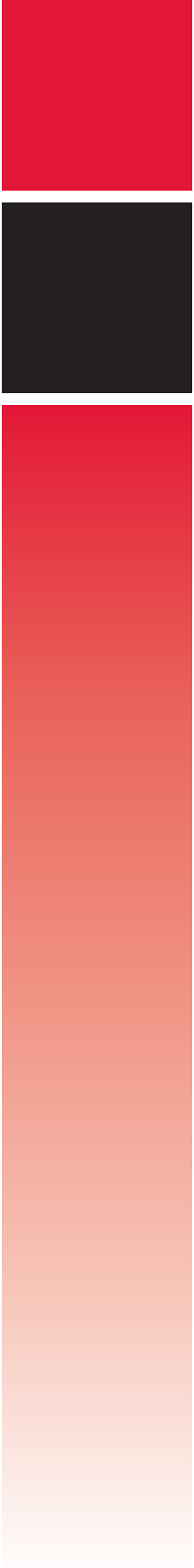
employers can alleviate the Medical Center's problems and help pupils find a career.

Next, Ms. McKenzie asked Mr. Gonzalez to compare the success prospects of students who have a high school diploma to those of GED holders. In contrast to popular belief, Mr. Gonzalez said that no significant difference in income separates high school graduates from women and men with a GED. He described the economy as an hourglass whose base consists of unskilled service industry employment and whose top is comprised of information and technology jobs. A college degree requirement separates the two and results in a deep divide in income. According to the Department of Labor, the earning disparity between people with and without a college degree is by far more significant than that between people with a high school diploma and a GED. A diploma does not guarantee a markedly higher degree of expertise than a GED. In fact, only 70% of high school graduates can pass the GED examination, and, as the requirements for high school graduation in Texas increase, so do the requirements for completing a GED.

During his work for the U.S. Department of Labor, Mr. Gonzalez realized that the reasons students drop out are more complicated than traditionally believed. Half of the men and women without a high school diploma have never attended high schools, he said. Frequently, they come from immigrant or migrant families. Of those who are enrolled, 72% get a diploma in four years, 4% get a GED, 11% remain in school after the fourth year, and 13% drop out. Surprisingly, white males are three times more likely to obtain a GED instead of a diploma than are females and minority males. Even more striking is that half of the dropouts come from families with no risk factors and do not fit the stereotypical description of intractable kids in need of reform. Rather, they grow bored with school and reluctant to deal with bureaucracy. Low enrollment and inefficient secondary education are two insufficiently recognized factors responsible for the high rates of people without a high school diploma. Mr. Gonzalez emphasized that the innovations discussed at the symposium, such as personalization of the school environment and higher interactivity, are key mechanisms for resolving this problem.

Ms. McKenzie's next question addressed both panelists: what is the relationship between educating responsible citizens and ensuring students' academic proficiency? Mr. Mosbacher pointed out that the rapid growth and increasing diversity of Texas' population will present future challenges to both the political leadership of the state and its citizens. One way to alleviate the pressures and secure equal chances for all students is to provide a strong pre-school education. Mr. Mosbacher, as co-chairman of Pre-School for All, said he knows of numerous studies that demonstrate that a good pre-school education "level[s] the playing field significantly" and gives an equal start to students from different backgrounds. Investment in a good pre-school education pays for itself many times over. Unfortunately, many business people are still unaware of its benefits and are unwilling to pay for it. In developing a new system for public school financing, it is very important to determine what would it take to secure a meaningful investment in pre-schools even though in the short term such decisions may be painful.

Mr. Gonzalez added that Texans face the challenge not only of a phenomenal population growth of 2.5% per year but also of highly mobile segments of society. Some students come from families of migrant workers; others are recent immigrants. Student mobility at some schools is 30% to 50%. One way to overcome the problems of rapid turnover and to increase children and community engagement is by making the school culture more welcoming to the important assets that parents and businesspeople bring



to the table. Mr. Gonzalez pointed out that Houston ISD has a lot of potential and his own children have received an excellent education in Houston schools. However, "all teachers can have a bad day and sometimes even a bad year," and it is the responsibility of parents and advocates to assist and make sure that even in bad times, schools perform as expected.

Mr. Gonzalez also serves as a co-chair of the Houston ISD Performance Examination, Evaluation and Redesign (PEER) Task Force to Improve Graduation Rates. Members of the task force looked at current research, at national and local trends, and developed recommendations about how to improve Houston ISD's work. When seeking to retain students in school, it is essential that educators do not rely only on social services and counseling but also practice academic and social intervention. "We can't wait for kids to fail. We have to catch them when they start floundering and move them forward," said Mr. Gonzalez.

Ms. McKenzie next asked Mr. Mosbacher whether he has observed a shift in the attitudes of key business and civic leadership and a sincere desire on their part to support changes in the educational sphere. In the last 10 years, Mr. Mosbacher said, businesses have demonstrated increasing interest and willingness to participate in school affairs. Thanks to the efforts and integrity of Kaye Stripling, Ed.D., the Houston ISD superintendent, and her predecessor, Rod Paige, Ph.D., now U.S. Secretary of Education, the business community has developed an enviable dialogue and relationship of trust with educators. Community members have been given the opportunity to express their views, ask tough questions, and get to the bottom of events in the educational sphere. Rather than fearing the business community's competition, Houston ISD turned to its members for help in managing its non-educational affairs. Mr. Mosbacher expressed his regret that such rapport is unique to Houston and does not extend to other American cities and states.

Mr. Mosbacher is a vice-chairman of the Greater Houston Partnership.

Mr. Gonzalez is vice-president of Employment & Training Centers, Inc.

Ms. McKenzie is executive director of the Joint City/County Commission on Children.

What Are the Policy Implications? Where Do We Go from Here?

Panelists

Stephanie Sanford, Ph.D./Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Hans Meeder/U.S. Department of Education

Paul Cruz, Ph.D./Texas Education Agency

Moderator

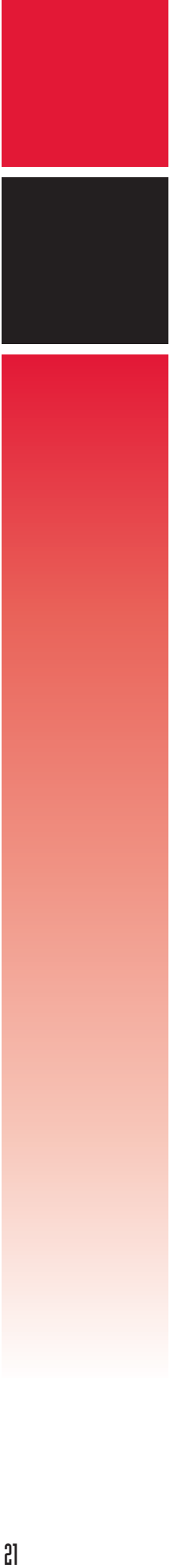
Rob Mosbacher/Greater Houston Partnership

Dr. Sanford began the panel presentation by elaborating on the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's funding philosophy. Dr. Sanford quipped that the foundation sought to concentrate on "the biggest, hairiest, most intractable, difficult problems that nobody else is working on, and picked infectious diseases in the third world and American high schools..." According to a report of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) that compares the academic levels of American youngsters to that of children worldwide, elementary students in the United States have a higher competence in math and science than any other children across the globe. American middle school pupils match the average world levels in the same subjects. Despite these good results, American high school students perform significantly lower. The math and science competence of 10th graders is among the lowest in the world. While the educational system does an excellent job in the elementary levels, the gains are not sustained throughout the secondary grades, she said.

Statistics on dropout rates illustrate another problem of American high schools: close to one-third of the 3.5 million American 8th graders drop out of school before graduating. Every day an average of 3,500 students walk out of their classrooms and never come back; two-thirds of them are African-American and Hispanic. In addition, 40% of those who do graduate are insufficiently prepared to enroll in post-secondary institutions.

Most schools with low dropout rates and high student achievement display similar characteristics, said Dr. Sanford. They have a well-defined focus, high expectations from students, and respectful relationships between students and teachers. Pupils are occupied with engaging work and active use of technology, while teachers are allowed time for planning and professional improvement. Most successful schools offer a personal and thematically oriented environment radically different from the still functioning 100-year-old Fordist model of education and its maxim, "one size fits all." To create a personalized educational experience for students, it is necessary to find effective mechanisms that can transform the large high schools into new smaller and more effective institutions. Because this process involves risks and experimentation that the public sector cannot afford, philanthropy's role is to make such innovation possible, said Dr. Sanford.





The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation believes that students should be treated as young adults rather than as children and encourages educational institutions to develop school environments that more closely resemble innovative workplaces than traditional, industrial era educational institutions. By providing students with exposure to the setting, practices and expectations of the adult world, schools prepare adolescents for success in real world environments. Dr. Sanford said that since each child learns differently, communities need a portfolio of distinctive schools from which a child can choose. In her view, "this is the way to make true the promise of 'No Child Left Behind'" ultimately providing poor families with school choices that so far have been available only to affluent groups.

Dr. Sanford discussed two key examples of successful schools funded by the foundation, High Tech High and Minnesota New Country. High Tech High is a public charter in San Diego that selects its students through a non-competitive lottery admission. Each year, the school spends \$5,200 per student. The curriculum, focused on pre-engineering preparation, employs real world immersion, personalized instruction, and detailed performance assessment. So far all graduating seniors have continued their education in college. The Gates Foundation also sponsors the Minnesota New Country High School in Henderson, Minnesota. Its 125 students from 6th to 12th grade occupy real life workspaces where they study alone or in teams. Before graduating, each student has to pass an exhibition open to the entire community, a practice that enhances both accountability and community involvement. High Tech High and Minnesota New Country "integrate mission, coherent goals and principles, curriculum and instruction, and organizational structure," said Dr. Sanford.

The speaker concluded with a reference to a Jane Wagner play in which an eccentric 20-year-old character with no immediate prospects for the future laments on stage: "You know, when I was in high school, I always wanted to grow up and be somebody. I see now I should have been more specific." The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation seeks to solve problems just like this, said Dr. Sanford. The foundation's goal is to help create new educational institutions that provide more effective pathways to college, work and citizenship rather than isolating young people in irrelevant and outdated schools that bear little resemblance to the world they will soon be entering.

In the next presentation, Mr. Meeder focused on federal projects on post-secondary and technical schools. The U.S. Department of Education sponsors intensive research in adolescent literacy with the understanding that without mastery of reading and writing, students cannot develop successful comprehension skills and achieve satisfactory performance. The federal government also sponsors the "State Scholars Initiative," which grew out of the Texas Scholars program mentioned earlier and presently functions in six other states: Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Maryland, Indiana, Tennessee and Arkansas. The business and educational coalitions created

by the program work to establish more exacting academic requirements for high school students. According to Mr. Meeder, low expectations are responsible for the poor performance of many high schools. Most pupils do not apply themselves fully unless they feel that this is expected from them. The speaker substantiated his observation with the story of a California student recounted in an Education Trust article. Even though the student's grade point average was below the requirement for an honors course enrollment, she was placed in an Honors Algebra II because the regular section of the course was full. The high expectations of the honors course motivated her to work hard and helped her raise her grades from C's and D's to A's and B's.

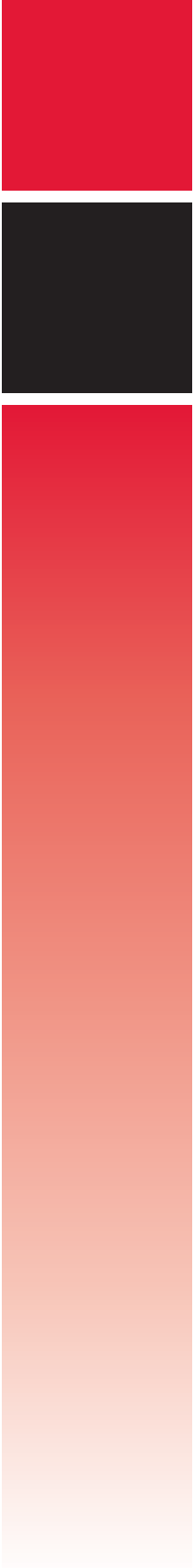
According to Mr. Meeder, the federal government is re-directing investment in vocational education. For the last 50 years, public education has been guided by the assumption that 20% of all students have the potential for college education while another 20% have the manual skills required for vocational training. While such a supposition was appropriate in the years after World War II, presently this model is outdated and needs to be changed. Today, the federal government gives preference to education that provides all students with knowledge and skills appropriate for post-secondary education and highly skilled work. Schools, which systematically follow this approach, are mostly innovative and on the margins. The Department of Education is currently working on legislation that will eliminate the marginality of these institutions and will make them central to the educational system.

Next, Mr. Meeder told the audience about "The College and Career Initiative," a joint project between the U.S. Department of Education and "The League for Innovation in the Community College" (www.league.org/cti). The initiative has organized 15 local partnerships between community technical colleges, pathway high schools and employers, whose goal is to create career programs for high school students. The focus areas addressed so far are health sciences, information technology, engineering, science and technology, education, law and public safety. The experience of these partnerships is expected to generate successful models that can be implemented in communities around the country.

Mr. Meeder said the U.S. Department of Education is working on a proposal for a Secondary and Technical Education Excellence Act that would blend high school improvement with the creation of occupational pathways. The legislation would assign a central role to partnerships between schools and community technical colleges, four-year post secondary institutions, and businesses. Each state would be awarded federal money for allocation to local partnerships. An essential provision of the Act would be to accelerate the transition from secondary to post-secondary education by allowing high school students to obtain college credit for technical classes as early as possible. Partnerships would be required to develop reform strategies for the group of students enrolled in the pathway programs, which would also benefit other students in the school. In conclusion, Mr. Meeder announced the High School Leadership Summit on October 8th, 2003, which will be hosted by the U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, and will launch a high school reform initiative by the Department.

Mr. Meeder's federal perspective on educational issues was complemented by Dr. Cruz's presentation on work at the state level and, specifically, the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The organization conducted intensive qualitative research on problems of the four million students in Texas. In talking to parents, teachers, and students, researchers sought to go beyond the statistics and hear





actual stories in order to identify effective educational practices. Dr. Cruz outlined some characteristics of most well performing schools. One of them is personalization, not only instructional but also in academic terms. Educators need to find ways to individualize instruction in addition to implementing the organizational changes that alter the student-teacher ratio and relationships. Successful schools align course offerings with credit requirements so that students can make informed decisions, are ready to graduate on time, and have the necessary college prerequisites. A key premise for effective education is flexibility in class scheduling. Because a large percentage of teenagers work, schools should accommodate them either by offering classes at alternative times (a zero period, for example) or via the Internet. Finally, the position of a formal mentor, be it a teacher, administrator, or a member of the community, is crucial for the progress of each student. Dr. Cruz concluded by saying that factors such as personalization, coordinated curriculum, flexible scheduling, and formal mentorship need to be taken into consideration by all educators who work towards ensuring that each student not only graduates but also possesses the academic capabilities for college.

Dr. Sanford is a senior policy officer for education and libraries at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Mr. Meeder is a deputy assistant secretary for policy at the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education.

Dr. Cruz is a deputy commissioner for dropout prevention and initiatives at the Texas Education Agency.

Mr. Mosbacher is a vice-chairman of the Greater Houston Partnership.

Symposium Outcomes

At the end of the day, participants concluded several factors are essential if we are to carry out and sustain needed changes in public education. They are:

- a common understanding of what constitutes successful learning practices
- a commitment from all stakeholders, including civic and business communities, parents, students, school districts, and policy makers, to making that change
- quality professional development for teachers
- adequate resources
- personalization of the school experience
- high expectations
- theme-based education
- teaching and learning
- time

Each of these nine factors is discussed in detail below.

In conclusion, American high schools need to be redefined, taking into account the tidal wave of economic, social, and intellectual changes that have transformed people's lives in the 21st century. We believe this to be possible if there is a common, community-based effort to revitalize high school education and transform it into an effective system of instruction.

Model for Successful Education

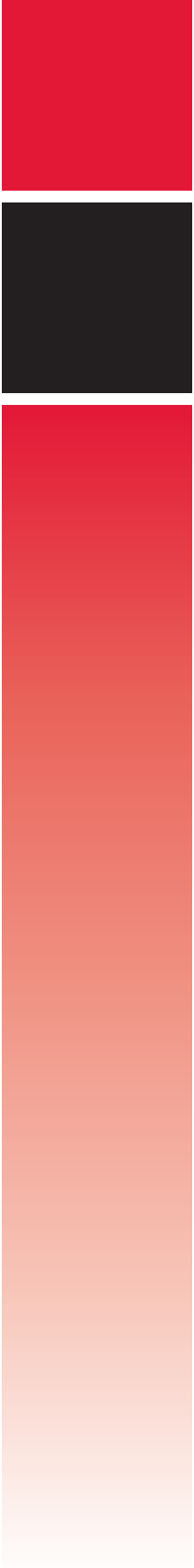
Common Understanding

Building a common understanding of what constitutes successful learning practices involves agreeing on a common framework for learning that revolves around successful instruction. This instruction should be rigorous, relevant and relationship driven. That framework gives shape to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It also requires that districts and school leaders organize personnel and resources only in ways that support and advance these core goals. In short, everything about the school day should revolve around successful instruction.

Community Involvement

The active involvement of businesses, universities, parents, and community associations in the life of public schools constitutes an essential prerequisite for success. A strong connection between the business community and high schools will afford students the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge that are up to date with the needs of the contemporary workplace. Both statistics and anecdotal





evidence show that most students' high school experience is ineffective and involves little interactive learning. Businesses should help educators keep up with the rising demands and constantly shifting needs of the workplace. Businesses should also help educators keep students interested and motivated to learn by offering resources for strategies such as hands-on practice, internships, and other modes of interactive learning. Cooperation with the business world will provide exposure to contemporary work conditions as well as give students the opportunity to match their interests with a possible career path.

Universities should help teachers keep up to date on new research in their disciplines and pedagogy; inform them of the types of skills and knowledge that students need for success in college; and allow professors to incorporate teachers' familiarity with the needs of contemporary schools in the instruction of new educators.

Additionally, the public must know, understand and approve of high school reinvention if sustainable change is to be possible.

Professional Development for Teachers

The school day should include time designated for teacher workshops and research. Teachers should have more flexibility in the scheduling of school time. Through externships and active interaction with businesses and universities, they should be given the opportunity to see the practical applications of the subjects they teach, to keep up to date with innovations in their fields, and to understand the demands of prospective employers.

Teachers also need professional development around incorporating literacy into the core content curriculum, such as mathematics and science. Being literate involves not only being able to read and write competently but also to speak, listen and think effectively. Current literacy education is limited to language arts classrooms and is practically absent from instruction in other subjects.

Adequate Resources

A shortage of textbooks and supplies is an example of how spending needs to be realigned in the schools so that all resources support the redesign and mesh with the twin goals of personalization and quality instruction. Other resources are time, staff and money.

Personalization

One of the major challenges before public high schools is the need to personalize instruction and compensate for the decreasing adult presence in children's lives. To foster personal interaction between students and faculty and eliminate anonymity,

many Houston high schools are creating small learning communities with teacher-to-student ratios significantly lower than those in traditional schools. In the new structure, teachers work with the same students for four years and develop personal familiarity with the pupils' abilities and needs. Teachers and administrators function as adult advocates who provide individual students with proactive guidance and with social and academic counseling. To meet the specific needs of each student, these structural changes need to be supplemented by individualized instruction in the classroom.

Theme-Based Education

A thematically oriented educational environment is important to keep students interested and motivated. For example, small learning communities in Houston high schools are each organized around a different theme, so that students in the same school can choose between several thematic orientations. A California school sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation prepares students for careers in engineering and technology. A Minnesota high school, sponsored by the same foundation, models its space and procedures after the setting, practices and expectations of the adult world in order to provide adolescents with exposure to real work environments and prepare them for success. Career, technical, and early college high schools are another way to keep students motivated while supplying them with knowledge and skills needed to be successful in college or the workplace.

High Expectations

High expectations motivate students to apply themselves fully to their studies and to perform better. Exacting academic requirements and assessment tests serve two important functions: providing a measure of accountability and raising the bar so that students themselves come to expect and achieve more.

Quality Teaching and Learning

Changing the structure of a high school without changing what goes on in the classroom will not achieve the desired goals. Learning does not stop when a student leaves a classroom. Quality instruction is hands-on, interactive, project-based and connected to the real world.

Redesigning Use of Time

Students learn at different rates and schools should reflect this reality. Students should be afforded the amount of time it takes to learn a subject, whether it be half a semester or a semester and a half. Scheduling should be flexible and customized to each student.



THE HOUSTON  CHALLENGE
formerly The Houston Annenberg Challenge

1415 Louisiana, Suite 3250 • Houston, TX 77002
713.658.1881

www.houstonaplus.org

©2003 Houston A+ Challenge